

Platypus parallelus F. (= *linearis* Steph.) (Col.:
Scolytidae) Recaptured in Britain after 150 Years

By A. A. ALLEN*

While collecting (or rather, selecting) insects attracted to my mercury-vapour lamp at Blackheath on the night of 15th August, 1973, I was surprised to see a beetle of the distinctive woodboring genus *Platypus* settle on the brightly illuminated wall—since our single native species, *P. cylindrus* F., had never appeared in the district. Greater still was my astonishment when the visitor, safely tubed, was seen to be obviously not *P. cylindrus*, and therefore a species not “officially” on the British list. Through the good offices of Mr. R. T. Thompson at the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) the insect was duly passed to Mr. F. G. Browne (of the Commonwealth Institute of Entomology), our authority on the genus—a very numerous one in the tropics. Mr. Browne was able to identify it as a ♀ *Platypus parallelus* F.—the most widely distributed of all the species—with a slight element of uncertainty because of the lack of distinctive specific characters in that sex. However, all things considered, the probability of this determination being correct seems so high that I propose to accept it, for present purposes, without further question; particularly since *P. parallelus* (as will be seen) has in fact occurred once before in Britain, and might thus be expected to recur.

Stephens (1832, *Ill. Brit. Ent. Mand.*, 5: 419) described this species, apparently on a single male, under the name of *P. linearis*—a name by which it has long been widely known; but recently (S. L. Wood, 1973) it has been shown to be identical with the *Bostrichus parallelus* of Fabricius (1801, *Syst. El.*, 2: 384). It is usually smaller, of a paler colour (chestnut or rusty yellow-brown), than our native species; from which the male may be at once known by the three irregular processes at apex of elytra, of which the lateral ones are longest. The female lacks these processes and differs further in the smooth elytra—the sulcate striae and raised intervals being represented by rows of very small, fine, shallow punctures on an even, smooth, shining surface. Other differences from *cylindrus* (in the female) include a longer antennal club, much larger eyes, and details of the elytral apex.

Platypus parallelus is a widely-ranging species both in tropical and subtropical America from Argentina to Texas, and throughout tropical (and according to Schedl, southern) Africa. It has been recorded from a large number of host-trees, especially in the latter continent—at least 82 species in 25 families. Mr. Browne writes that it is essentially a secondary borer in the wood of dying or recently cut trees, and when found in apparently healthy ones (for the most part weakened by drought, etc.) it usually fails to breed; and that it shows no marked host preferences. I have seen no record of its importation into Europe, but such a species must surely get introduced in timber from time to time.

* 49, Montcalm Road, Charlton, London SE7 8QG.

The two British records have a certain interest beyond that of obviously imported insects. It is in any case remarkable that my capture as above is apparently the first known since Stephens's day; though one or two exotic *Platypus* spp. have occasionally been found here in foreign logs, etc.—e.g. *P. hintzi* Schauf. (= *penetralis* Sampson)—the present one seems not to be among them. Moreover both the captures of *P. parallelus* in this country relate to insects taken at large, and not in, on, or near known foreign timber or merchandise. Stephens's data for his *P. linearis*, as usual on the meagre side, are: "Taken near Sydenham by P. H. Desvignes, Esq." (*l.c. supra*) and "Old post: Sydenham: 6" (1839, *Man. Brit. Col.*: 206). The locality, like Blackheath, is in the suburbs of London—though then doubtless comparatively rural. Probably only a single specimen was concerned, as his description fits the male alone, but the most we can deduce with certainty is that no female occurred.

Again in the case of my specimen, no known source of exotic provenance can be suggested; certainly there was none in the garden or immediate vicinity, though, of course, the nearest Thames-side docks and wharves are not too distant for a flying insect to have come from—perhaps some three miles. Even so, a much nearer source seems far more likely.

One might speculate that such a widespread and polyphagous species must be remarkably hardy and adaptable and could possibly, therefore, breed—at least for a few generations—in the open in Britain; it is, perhaps, not out of the question that it might at some time gain a permanent footing. My capture could even be a sign that it was already happening; at all events, a sharp look-out should be kept for the beetle.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. F. G. Browne for his kindness in examining and reporting on the Blackheath specimen and for much useful information on the species.

ARCHIPS OPORANA L. (PICEANA P. & M.) NEW TO SUFFOLK.
— This large tortrix moth which is described as very local and uncommon and recorded only from Surrey, Hampshire, Dorset, Berkshire and Oxfordshire by both Meyrick and the Ray Society's "British Tortricoid Moths" was not even mentioned by the late Claude Morley in his 1937 *Memoirs of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society* which contained the latest county list of lepidoptera. I was therefore surprised when Mr. Donald Down showed me a specimen he had taken when we were collecting together in Dunwich Forest in 1974. He had the identification checked by Mr. H. C. Huggins. On 5th August, 1975 I took another specimen in the same area. These are presumably new records for Suffolk. On this latter occasion I was accompanied by Mr. B. W. Weddell and Baron Charles de Worms and our total species of macrolepidoptera recorded that evening was 120.
— H. E. CHIPPERFIELD, The Shieling, Walberswick, Suffolk, 27.i.1976.